

Moraga Safeway employee nears 50 years with the store

By Vera Kochan



Safeway's Greg De Carli at his checker's post. Photo Vera Kochan

Most shoppers at Safeway's 1355 Moraga Way location in Moraga simply know him as "Greg" thanks to his name tag, but the stalwart checker's nearly 50 years with the company has earned him additional recognition on social media.

Greg De Carli first began working for Moraga's Safeway in 1974, when it was at its orig-

inal location, just across the parking lot in the spot now occupied by McCaulou's.

De Carli was 23 years old at the time and fresh from taking courses with Safeway about things such as correctly identifying various types of produce. Once he "graduated" he was handed an envelope that told him which store he'd be assigned to work. A fellow

"graduate" told him that Moraga was a great location.

Through the years, De Carli has worked a variety of positions such as grocery clerk (restocking shelves between 3 p.m. to midnight), ice cream/dairy stocker, produce stocker (for one day, because he didn't like it), and his current position as checker (for the past 20 years).

"The first thing I bought with my earnings was a used car," recalled De Carli. "The next thing I bought was a camera." An avid amateur photographer, he practically took daily photos in 1986, when the current Safeway was under construction, documenting every aspect of the process including a picture of the new-fangled scanning machine that would become every checker's dream. "There were so many changes that we never thought would catch on."

De Carli remembers when the shelves were not as tall as today's, and on one occasion shoppers could see someone dressed as a Granny Goose

mascot handing out lunch box-sized bags of potato chips to little kids in the next aisle. "It was funny, because all you could see was the goose's head floating around on the other side."

Another memory involves a celebrity sighting of the late actor, Dennis Day, who was in town to attend his grandchild's graduation from Saint Mary's College.

Speaking of SMC, De Carli is amused by the grocery purchases the students make. "When the school year starts, and their parents come to the store with them to stock up their supply with healthy items, it all changes later in the year when the kids come on their own and buy junk food."

Safeway customer, Clay Watkins, has high praise for De Carli. "I have known him since I moved to Moraga 21 years ago, and he is a 'rock' at this store; very dependable and was at the store every day during the pandemic making sure we were all able to pur-

chase the food needed for our families. Greg is always polite, and kind, and just an all-around nice guy."

"Working during COVID was scary," remembers De Carli. "We all had 'Essential Worker' cards to be able to work during it. I remember that customers had to line up to come into the store, and some were even coughing. I'm glad that I have a high immune system."

De Carli plans on retiring from Safeway in August 2024 - his 50th anniversary. He will continue with his second job delivering pizzas for Round Table in Martinez, and does plan on traveling to Europe, especially Switzerland, and taking loads of photos to add to his collection of various locations around the Bay Area, such as the Golden Gate Bridge and Mount Diablo.

Memories of Moraga will include his many customers. "The people are really fun," he stated. "And, I've worked here long enough to see the babies now having babies."

Success continues to breed success for Randy Bennett and the Gaels

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Bennett is very comfortable with the team's starting guards, junior Augustas Marculionis and Mahaney, both who played in every game last season as starters and substitutes. Each is able to play the point or two guard and Bennett is effusive in his praise of both: "Augustas has really improved as a shooter that can score. When he was a freshman, he was just a really good kid, coming into a country where English was not his native language, dealing with so many things growing up so far away from home and he's matured in so many ways on the court, we feel his impact a lot more now."

After averaging 13.9 points a game last season, Mahaney received many accolades - named WCC's Freshman of the Week 10 times, becoming the second freshman (Patty Mills) in the program's history to be named First Team All-WCC and has just been named a top-20 finalist for the Jerry West Shooting Guard of the Year. "I just know he's gotten better," Bennett said. "He's gotten stronger, more durable, and faster along with being even a better shooter by being more on balance and is a better defender. He's pretty conscientious about trying to improve his weaknesses and strengthen his strengths. He and Augustas are able to play off each other now. They definitely move the ball better than we did last year, and I think they really enjoy playing with one another."

Redshirt sophomore Chris Howell will be the first guard off the bench. "He's a good size guard that can play all three positions," Bennett said.

Redshirt freshmen Rory Hawke and Cade Bennett and freshman Jordan Ross will be competing for playing time in the backcourt. "Hawke is a two-guard who is growing right now and is going to be a good player," Bennett said. "He's really tough and has a good work ethic and attitude. He can get to the basket and shoot it along with bringing it on defense. Cade has the advantage of having been in our program, so he's been through it, and he's been doing well. Jordan has really improved the last few weeks. He's getting better offensively and defensively and he's learning to bring it every day and could eventually be the backup point guard to Augustas and Aidan."

The forward position is also blessed with talent, experience, and youth. Fifth year senior Alex Ducas is ranked sixth at Saint Mary's in most 3-point field goals made and fifth in foul shot percentage (83.9%) for his career and has been named honorable mention all-league the past two seasons. Backing him up will be red-

shirt junior Luke Barrett. "Luke Barrett has also gotten better and is going to be a backup perimeter player that gets stuff done and gives us something different on the perimeter and is going to see good minutes for us," Bennett said. "He plays really hard and has become a good defender."

The power forward position is going to be manned by Mason Forbes and sophomore Joshua Jefferson. Forbes' playing time at Harvard was limited due to injuries and the COVID pandemic. Forbes reminds Bennett of Diamon Simpson (2005-2009), Saint Mary's career rebound leader and Dane Pineau (2013-2017), a 61.6 shooter from the field and the Gaels' fifth all-time shot blocker.

"Mason is going to really improve as the season goes on and he continues to learn our system," Bennett said. "He just keeps improving every day because he was able to redshirt for us last year and he's made a big jump in our first four weeks of practice. He can score inside and can also hit the three-point shot enough to keep you honest. He's a rim protector and scores around the basket."

In only his second season, Jefferson has established himself as an all-round talent. "Joshua is a good scorer on the boards and is a terrific passer," Bennett said. "He is different because he's such a high IQ player and he complements our group. He has become a good defender and offensively, he just makes everyone else better."

Kevin Gad, who redshirted last year, has been out with an ankle injury since December and has started practicing and is doing well. Freshman Jensen Bradtke, from Australia, is still in a learning situation. "Jensen is getting better, but he is in the normal freshman growth situation and will keep improving as he keeps going."

At the center position, returning starter senior Mitchell Saxen will be backed up again by sophomore Harry Wessels. "Saxen and Wessels have both really improved," Bennett said. "Mitchell has put on 15 pounds, gotten stronger and is a better scorer and more confident. Wessels is weighing 275 now. He has improved, is more confident and a better scorer around the basket, giving us an additional low power player. Freshman Andrew McKeever (Livermore), gets to play against these guys every day in practice and he's getting better fast."

With so much talent on the team, the key for the team's success, according to Bennett, is to avoid injuries. "Staying healthy - that's the big one," Bennett said. "We also have to be unselfish. We do have that character but that doesn't mean it's an automatic and you

have to deal with it and we want to make sure that's our identity. If we can do those two things and keep improving, which is easy to say and hard to do, we have a chance to have a really good year."

Bennett's particularly proud of the way so many players have developed since their arrival at Saint Mary's: "We've always been good as far as the development of players. We see Jordan Ford go from a guy who had to work to get any minutes as a freshman to now playing in the NBA (Sacramento Kings). (Assistant coach) Mickey McConnell being a player that had a lot of DNP's (Did not play) as a freshman to being named the Player of the Year as a senior in the WCC and Jock Landale going from playing about 15 minutes a game as a sophomore, along with his DNP's as a freshman also getting named Player of the Year and also playing in the NBA (Houston Rockets), and that's been kind of our narrative."

Although each team that Bennett has coached has had unique talents, character and personalities, there has been four constants that he has addressed with each team. "The first things I talked about to the guys I inherited in my first season are the same things that I talk to our guys about right now," Bennett said. "We had to do the things that we could control. The big things were work ethic, which was something that we could not get around if we were ever going to be any good at Saint Mary's, and we can control that. Then there's attitude which is another thing that we can totally control and we had to start developing that. We also needed leadership, which is something that they did not have, and I had to start developing that, which was hard. When you inherit a team (2-22) that is really beat down and struggled as far as winning and losing, we had to get some senior leadership, then develop it from our younger guys and then become an unselfish team. At that point, we hammered it, and we still hammer it because we had success with it. It gets down to the same stuff, but we're playing for different stakes now. We did those things early and we were able to recruit players like Anthony Woodards and Adam Caporn and Samuel St. Jean (all 2001-2003). Players like that helped us start building the program and then here comes E.J. Rowland and Daniel Kickert. Those guys were talents and now some of the foundation had been laid. When we were able to finally build it with freshmen like Diamon, Omar Samham, Wayne Hunter and then Patty Mills, Mickey McConnell, and Matthew Dellavedova, we've been pretty much freshmen ever since."

Bennett also identifies with successful programs at Duke, North Carolina and Syracuse that have had such little turnovers with their head coaches. "Continuity with a successful team is so underrated if you can do it right,

keeping your players and assistant coaches, but most importantly, with the head coach because you can build a family, you can build a program, you can build tradition. It's hard to beat if you get the right people and double down on it."

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